

Snowing by maplestreet83

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Summary:

The first snowfall of 1984 brings different reactions from different members of the party. For El it's a time to confront bad memories and make new, better ones.

Snowing

By mid-December it had become a tradition that every Friday after school the party would all come to see El at the cabin. Each member would bring one of their favorite books, movies, tapes or comic books to help El pass the time until the next week and a new batch of entertainment. This week Max had brought in the newest issue of the X-Men, Lucas had the Ghostbusters VHS, Dustin a book of all the birds of North America (after the book on all the flowers in North America had been such a hit last week), Will had one of the favorite picture books he from when he was younger (El's reading was slowly improving but she still preferred books with beautiful pictures in them), and Mike had brought in a record filled with different Christmas songs as he had noticed how much she had seemed to like them as some were played at the Snow Ball the previous week.

After an afternoon of reading comics and watching Ghostbusters (El was happy to finally understand the costumes she had heard Mike talk about so many times to his supercom), the party started to head out the door.

"Bye, Jim! See you next week!" Will said, waving his hand at the Chief who had been hunched over the dinner table all night, desperately trying to get some work done despite of the constant noise and distractions from the six teens. If he had to listen to them sing that damn Ghostbusters theme song one more time, he swore he was officially gonna go mad.

"Yeah, see you then!" he answered as the others also shouted their goodbyes as they started to put on their winter boots and coats. Some damn kids had stolen old man Larson's garden gnomes again and Hopper swore to catch them for good this time. Looking up from his files he saw El also putting on her warm winter coat. She always walked the others back to the road, and he let her, she had been away from her friends for so long that extra fifteen minutes with them didn't hurt.

"It's getting cold out there, kid. Remember to put on your hat and

gloves,” Hopper told her before moving his attention back to his papers. El finished zipping up her coat and looked at him with a smile.

“I will. Don’t worry.” After everyone had grabbed their backpacks the group left the cabin, entering into the dark and cold December night. El had brought a flashlight as always when they stayed for this long and she handed it over to Dustin who declared he would take the lead in the group. Suddenly a fierce wrestling match for the job developed between him and Lucas who claimed it was his turn to lead the party.

“You two are such dorks, you know that right?” Max pointed out while swiftly grabbing the flashlight out of their hands while the two boys weren’t looking, flicking the light on and heading forward along the familiar forest path.

“Hey! Not fair!” Lucas exclaimed, spreading his hands as Dustin grabbed his hat that had fallen on the ground during the scuffle and Mike, Will, and El laughed at the whole situation.

“You should’ve kept your eyes open, stalker! Come on let’s go! I don’t really wanna freeze my butt off!” Max yelled, spinning around to shine the flashlight toward them and shoving her green beanie further down on her head.

“Ooooh, California girl can’t stand the cold, huh?” Dustin yelled back with a laugh and the three of them continued their usual bickering while all of them started walking away from the cabin. Will walked right behind the three, occasionally sharing in their playful insults and laughing along with them. He was still smaller than the other boys but he had started to grow and look more healthy and whole every day. Mike and El were the last ones, slightly swinging their clasped, gloved hands between them as they walked, talking about what books from last week El had liked the best.

“Lucas gave me a book about the outer space,” she explained, proud of herself for remembering the proper word. “It had pictures of all the stars, and and planets,” she continued, looking up at the dark sky.

“It’s too bad it’s too cloudy tonight, that’s why you can’t see the

stars," Mike explained, also looking up. El nodded her head slowly in understanding, tugging on the little string on her red hunting hat. Mike swallowed loudly, considering his words before speaking again, his breath freezing in the air as he did so:

"I-if you want, and it's okay with Hopper, I could maybe come over some night when it's not cloudy. I have books on space too and we could maybe, uh look at the stars together on my telescope."

"Telescope?" El asked, her face scrunching up like always when she heard an unfamiliar word.

"Yeah, um... It's like this tube you look into, and it helps you see the stars better. From up close. Like that magnifying class Dustin had with him that one time, remember?"

El nodded, smiling up at him.

"Okay, telescope," she said slowly.

"Yeah, you got it! I think it would be cool. I-I mean if you'd like to?" Mike stuttered, scratching the back of his neck like any time he was nervous around her.

"Yes. I'd like it, Mike. I'll ask Hop," El answered with a warm grin.

They walked a few minutes more, finally catching up to the rest of the party. Suddenly there was a yell from Max.

"Holy shit! Are you guys seeing this?" She shot the beam of the flashlight high up toward the tree tops and they all quickly turned their heads up to see what she was talking about.

"Oh, it's snowing!" Will said with surprise in his small voice. And it was true, there were fluffy, slow snowflakes gently falling down from the dark clouds.

"That's it? Shit, you scared me Max!" Dustin exclaimed.

"Yeah, I thought it was a flying demodog or something!" Lucas

added.

“Oh come on guys! This is not fricking amazing to you? It just started snowing out of the blue! This is so awesome! I’ve never seen snow before!” Max shouted with joy in her voice, spinning around, looking up at the sky and the falling snowflakes, the beam of the flashlight turning around with her.

“You gotta be shitting me!?” Dustin said, his eyes wide.

“You’ve never seen snow?” Mike asked with surprise in his voice.

El’s breath got hitched in her throat and she squeezed Mike’s hand a little stronger. The snow reminded her of the weeks she had spent alone, fending for herself in the woods in the bitter cold. Mike turned quickly to face her.

“You okay, El?” he asked quietly, his dark eyes filling with concern as he looked at her.

“I-I... I don’t like snow.” El explained quietly, trying not to worry the others. “Because of...last winter,” she said, biting her lip as tears started to pool in her eyes.

“Are you okay El?” Lucas asked with worry in his voice, and El and Mike looked up at the rest of the party that had turned to look at them with concern.

“Are you cold? Do you need help?” Will asked, walking over to El and setting his hand on her shoulder.

“Was it something I said?” Max asked, uncertainty and apology in her face: “I’m so sorry, I’m so stupid I don’t know what to do...”

El felt her rapid pulse in her ears, closing her eyes, taking a deep, shuddering breath. She felt Mike squeeze her hand tentatively, a question, and she squeezed back. She felt him turn completely to face her and gently pull her close to his chest, wrapping his arms around

her. She took deep breaths, burying her face into his shoulder and the fabric of his soft jacket. There were quiet whispers between Mike and the others before El could feel Dustin join the hug, and Will, Max and Lucas soon after that. They stood there for a while, huddled together as the snow kept silently falling around them. El could feel her heartbeat starting to slow down and taking another, relieved breath, she moved her head up slightly, which was awkward as they were all so close together. The whole situation brought such relief to her that she let out a small laugh. Everyone's heads snapped back at the sudden sound, Dustin banging heads with Mike and then swearing loudly.

"Oh, sorry," El said with a small smile as the group finally started to separate from each other.

"Well, luckily you both have those perms to soften the blow," Lucas commented, roughly ruffling Dustin's huge mess of curly hair.

"You sure you're feeling better?" Mike asked again, looking back down at El.

"Yes," she answered with a sigh. She turned to Max, who was still looking a bit uncertain.

"It was not your fault. Snow is pretty. I'm happy you are happy," she told her with a small smile.

"You're sure? I swear I didn't know it would upset you. I feel so stupid for acting that excited, I mean it's just snow, right? No big deal," she said, shrugging her shoulders. El shook her head at her.

"It's okay. Don't worry, Max. It is great you are seeing snow for the first time. You should be excited!" she assured, quickly glancing up at Mike during the last word to make sure she used it right.

There was a small, reassuring smile from him and then Max sighed in relief and said:

"Ok, cause I really am so damn excited! I mean look at this! This is so...so..." she gushed, lifting her head back up to look at the falling snowflakes.

“Totally tubular?” Lucas asked in the familiar mocking surfer accent, Dustin also joining in. Max playfully gave them the finger, which lost its effect a bit as she was wearing fluffy orange mittens.

“Try to catch them with your tongue, like this!” Will suggested, walking over to Max and showing her how to do it.

They started to slowly walk along the path again, heads turned up and tongues sticking out, trying to catch the fluffy snowflakes in their mouths. Max was so excited that she almost tripped on a tree root, luckily Will and Lucas were there to catch her. El’s anxiety was slowly passing, the memories of her hungry and cold, huddled under a fallen over tree in a snowstorm, replaced with images of her friends laughing as they jumped around, trying to catch the falling snowflakes and gathering the small amount of snow that had reached the ground, and trying to shove it into each others’ faces or down the backs of each other’s coats. The latest victim had been Mike, who had been ambushed by Lucas who had crept up behind him and dumped handfuls of snow and dirt on his head as he had been busy looking in awe at El as she was trying to catch snowflakes with her free hand.

“Gotcha lover boy!” Lucas yelled in victory and ran away as Mike screamed and sprinted forward to catch him.

“You asshole! Don’t run away from me!” Mike yelled, grabbing more snow from the ground and trying to catch Lucas. El laughed alongside the others as Mike reached him, showing a handful of snow down the back of his neck, Lucas letting out high-pitched screams as he did so.

“Stop it, stop it! Shit! Not fair Mike!” he yelled, trying to shake the snow off of him.

“You did ask for it,” Will commented with a smirk. Lucas turned to him with a faked look of utter betrayal on his face.

“Come on Will! We’re taking sides here now? Not cool man!”

The group continued on their way, approaching the steep hill that lead down to the road. Mike was taking off his glove, reaching up to get the rest of the snow and pieces of dried leaves off of his hair.

“Let me help you,” El said with a smile, walking over to him, taking off her pink gloves.

“Oh, thanks,” Mike said, flashing a surprised smile as El stood on her tippy toes, reaching her fingers up to his hair, picking off little grains of dirt and sweeping away snow.

“Better,” she said, picking up a last piece of leaf and flicking it away.

“Better,” he answered, looking down at her, his eyes soft. Even though there was no snow left, El’s fingers somehow found their way back up into his dark hair, which was starting to slightly curl along the ends because of the moisture. There was confusion and surprise in his face.

“Something left?”

“No,” El answered, twirling a lock of curly dark hair around her finger.

“Your hair. It’s pretty,” she continued matter-of-factly, lowering her gaze from his hair to meet his eyes.

“Oh, um thanks,” Mike stuttered, his cheeks and ears flushing to red. El let out a curious hum, bringing her other hand up to gently touch his blushed cheek. Mike shivered at the touch of her warm hand on his skin and looked down at her, his eyes hooded, his lips slightly parted. Their faces were inches apart from each other, their frozen breaths mingling together. Blinking up at him, El moved her hand away from his hair to his other cheek, gently pulling his face down to meet hers. Their lips brushed against each other, warm and soft in the cold December air and El could feel Mike setting his hands on her waist, helping her keep her balance. The kiss was soft and gentle and El soon pulled away, setting herself back down on the soles of her feet and lowering her hands to rest on Mike’s shoulders. Now it was

her time to blush as she let out a small giggle and Mike reached down, setting a little peck on the tip of her cold nose. Looking up at him, El could see his face filled with happiness and some other unreadable emotions she had yet to completely understand the names for. But she knew her eyes reflected those emotions right back at him as her mouth settled on a crooked smile.

“Oh, *come on*, you guys!” Dustin yelled from the bottom of the hill where the rest of the group had already reached.

“My dad is already waiting for us, I don’t wanna be late just because you two were sucking face!” Lucas exclaimed, pointing towards the road where Mr. Sinclair’s car was parked.

“You are just jealous,” El answered him in a grin, surprising everyone and coaching mocking ‘oooos’ and laughter out of them as she and Mike separated and started to carefully walk down the hill. After finally reaching the car the group said their goodbyes to El before piling into the backseat of the car. Mike was the last one to step in, holding onto El’s hand until the last possible moment as usual.

“Okay, bye El,” Dustin said one last time, really emphasizing his words while Will tried his best to yank Mike into the car. The tall and lanky boy somehow managed to bump his head on the door frame and El reached her hand up to touch his head, making sure he was fine. “I’m okay, I’m okay!” Mike explained, his voice breaking a bit as he finally settled on the crowded back seat.

“See you next week, El!” Max said with a smile, peeking past Dustin and Will, waving her hand at her. El waved back with a smile and started to close the door.

“I-I’ll call you tomorrow! Remember to ask Hopper about, about what we talked about, okay?” Mike rushed to say, holding the door open with his hand, looking up at her.

“I will,” El answered in an amused tone, swiftly leaning in to place one more little peck on his lips before closing the car door. As the car drove away, El stood there for a while, waving at them until they

disappeared around a bend. Burying her face into her soft wool scarf and looking up at the snow slowly floating down, she thought that maybe it wasn't so bad after all.